



Marie Dressler is Poison to the Stars of Hollywood. No Picture is Safe when she's around

THERE is a thief abroad in Hollywood.

At the mention of that name the greatest stars in the business tremble as Scotland Yard once trembled at the name of Raffles. No one is safe—not even the immortal Garbo.

Give her enough footage and she'll steal any picture from anybody.

Stealing a picture is an achievement almost as difficult as robbing the Bank of England. In Hollywood it is the secret ambition of every actor and actress who isn't a star.

Stealing the show is an old stage custom which has elevated many a name into electric lights.

Stealing a picture is the latest short cut to high salary in the movies.

It means that in a subordinate rôle someone has overshadowed the star. A player cast in a rôle less important than the star's receives the best notices, the most applause and stands out as the person to be remembered in that particular picture.

Marie Dressler has made an art of it.

CHARACTER women, especially comedy character women, are not supposed to steal pictures. It's agin nature. They are supposed to remain in the background as props and supports for the glittering youth, male or female, who happens to occupy the major portion of the title sheet.

The background hasn't been invented that can hold Marie Dressler. She just naturally pops out.

Walking across the M-G-M lot the other day, I heard someone say: "Well, she's done it again."

Inquiry revealed that Miss Dressler had just finished stealing "Let Us

Be Gay" from Norma Shearer, Rod La Rocque, Sally Eilers and Gilbert Emery. Miss Shearer is young and beautiful—more beautiful than she has been at any time in her screen career. Besides being an excellent actress she is the wife of Irving

The THUNDER THIEF

By
ADELA ROGERS
ST. JOHNS

Thalberg, dictator extraordinary of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer productions. He'd be a funny man if he didn't see to it that his wife didn't get any the worst of it in stories, directors and production value.

Nevertheless, Marie Dressler had succeeded in taking the honors.

BILL HAINES, who is one of her greatest friends, said to me the other day: "Look what she did to me, the old thief. Why, she just took 'The Girl Said No' right out from under my nose. Once you let her on the set you're finished.

"She said to me, 'Oh, Bill, my teeth. I've had such trouble with my teeth. It's funny, since we've got such fine dentists, how much more trouble you have with your teeth than you ever did before. What is this picture? I'm sure I can't do it. My teeth bother me so. They say I did well in 'Anna Christie.' Well, Bill darling, if you really want me—I was going to Europe—still—"

"I wanted her all right—and look what happened." Rumor hath it that she has stolen "The Swan" (now called "One Romantic Night") from Lillian Gish. Greatest of all, in a part that ended early in the picture, she ran a neck and neck finish with Garbo in "Anna Christie." If she'd had another reel it would have been just too bad. I know the thing I remember best in that picture is Marie Dressler.

Why?

THERE are two reasons, I think, for Marie Dressler's power to dominate scenes and pictures.

First, she has a tremendous personality, vibrant with fascination, with sheer humanity. In every little moment, in every big scene, she is so *human* that she stirs the memory-mind of each individual in the audience. Her comedy and her pathos are part of her and they are expressions of the comedy and pathos in our own lives.

Second, she has had forty years on the stage, at everything from chorus girl to star.

Give anyone a fine natural gift and forty years in which to perfect the tools to carry on that gift and you have something so deep and mellow and powerful that youth itself must fall before it.

Into her work Marie Dressler pours all that she is as a woman, and her long experience of dramatic technique projects her wide understanding of life right out of the screen and into the very heart of a crowd always hungry for the tears that are close to laughter and the laughter that is close to tears.

And as a woman Marie Dressler is—let me see—



No woman wants to be a comic. Marie Dressler never wanted to be a comedienne. She has always longed to do big dramatic roles. Then—close to sixty—her dream came true with the role of Marthy in "Anna Christie."

she's—no, there is no one phrase, no short sentence that can contain her. As well try to describe the state of California in a few words.

She's ornery—just plain ornery. She's magnificent in honesty and generosity. She's a veritable upheaval of emotion. Her heart is as big as the Grand Canyon, but her mind is keen and shrewd, quite capable of looking out for Marie Dressler and her interests. Her vocabulary contains more superlatives than any other in Hollywood. Her likes and dislikes are as positive as Mussolini's. She is afraid of nothing and nobody—in fact she is one of the few people in this business who seem free of the fear complex in some form or another. Approaching sixty, her vitality and interest in life would shame sixteen.

Altogether, she is a grand person.

TAKE Marie in a bridge game. She adores bridge and plays an amazing game.

But the excitement! The tenseness! The battle of it!

You sit down at a bridge table with Marie. She scoops up her cards and without deigning to give them a glance, bids one no trump. If her partner fails to bid at any time, she is seriously annoyed. "You've got thirteen cards, haven't you?" she says. Having over-bid recklessly, she then (Continued on page 122)

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The Thunder Thief

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expends enough energy to move a good-sized mountain in attempting to make the bid—and nine times out of ten pulls a rabbit out of a hat.

If her partner is a good player, she calls attention to his mistakes in the manner of Queen Elizabeth sentencing Essex to the block. If he isn't a good player, she smiles benignly and pets him on the back for losing only two tricks by misplays.

As Bill Haines says "Playing bridge with Marie is like living through a cyclone. But it's stimulating. I'd rather play with her than with Work, myself."

SPEAKING of work—Marie Dressler is the actress to her fingertips. She has that poise, that graciousness, that brilliant play of voice and facial expression, that ability to make her point which are part of the finished personality of every great stage star, as ease of muscle and bodily control belong to the great athlete.

Talk to Ina Claire for an hour and conversation with any woman, no matter how sweet she may be or how worth while her thoughts, becomes as insipid as a cold cup of coffee.

The let-down from Marie's conversation to that of most people is the let-down from Helen Wills to a high school champ.

When she talks—and she loves to talk, loves an audience, loves people—when she talks all that swift change of mood, all the delicate shadings to awaken laughs and heart throbs, the little pauses for emphasis, the mobile play of every feature, hold you spell-bound as she holds an audience. Yet she's never affected. It's all become

part of herself. That is Marie Dressler.

If you saw Marie Dressler in "The Callahans and the Murphys," which brought her back to the screen after a long absence, it may be difficult to realize that Marie Dressler is very much the *grande dame*—oh, very much. No one takes liberties, no one ignores the usual formalities of polite society in her presence.

I KNOW one young man who had the misfortune one evening after dinner in her house to follow an old Chinese custom, which in that older civilization is considered naught but a compliment to the excellent food provided by one's host. In the good old Anglo-Saxon which is becoming more and more popular all the time, he belched.

Marie turned upon him a frozen countenance and a lifted eyebrow.

"Perhaps you had better take a little walk in the garden" she said. "I am a comedienne only on the screen."

That is true. Marie is witty, she tells a funny story well, her laugh is hearty, but unlike her friend and co-star, Polly Moran, she doesn't do spontaneously funny things, she never pulls her stuff in the drawing-room. Polly just naturally can't help being funny. Marie can—and does.

Perhaps the sweetest thing about Marie Dressler is her honest interest in everybody else. What you are doing, how your life and work are progressing, is of real interest to her. If you don't see her for months, she remembers how old all your children are, and their names and some little story about them.

There is no affectation in her idolatry

COMING

IN NEXT MONTH'S NEW MOVIE

HERB HOWE'S HISTORY OF HOLLYWOOD

Remember Herb Howe's Guide Book to Hollywood? That was perhaps the most popular feature published by NEW MOVIE up to date. Next month Mr. Howe relates the fascinating and colorful history of the world's most romantic town from the days of the Indians and the coming of the pioneers.

Here is a feature you will want to save. Watch for it! Mr. Howe's History of Hollywood will be illustrated with numerous unpublished photographs showing the old and the new Hollywood.

where children are concerned. Frances Marion, the famous writer, is her closest friend, and Marie will desert any party on Sunday afternoon, no matter how brilliant, to play with the kids in their sandpile.

Really, she should have had a dozen running around. But the one great love affair of her life was overshadowed with tragedy. The man she loved was for many years an invalid and Marie cared for him and nursed him to the day of his death. In spite of the unfortunate circumstances, Marie would have no one else. So her life has been lonely at times, and lacked those things which should have been hers—a home and children. Much of that repression, and of the grief she felt at his passing, have gone to make the undying pathos

that is hers in such parts as Marie Smith in "Caught Short."

MARIE never wanted to be a comedienne.

Like all great comics, she is terrifically sensitive. Her feelings are easily hurt. Her lower lip trembles and she assumes an enormous dignity. Probably no woman was ever more *woman* than Marie Dressler.

And let me tell you something that I have discovered from long association with the great women comics, such as Fannie Brice and Marie Dressler and Polly Moran. No woman likes to be funny. It robs her immediately of something that is a woman's birthright. They live above it, they solace the deep feelings which must be beneath all comedy with the pride of giving laughter to the world, but they carry within themselves a certain wistful withdrawal, a spot of hurt pride.

Polly Moran can kid about herself and her figure. But even her best friends can't kid her about it—and Polly is a great scout and has a sense of humor big enough to cover everything else in the world.

So always Marie Dressler—for thirteen years the great drawing card of Weber and Fields—has wanted to play drama. She knows what everyone connected with the theater knows, that comedy is the hardest thing on earth to play, the supreme test of the actor. Anyone who can play high comedy can take a rest in a heavy dramatic rôle. There was more dramatic power, more actual technique and hard work in Ina Claire's performance in "The Gold Diggers" than in Jeanne Eagels's Sadie Thompson.

Thus the rôle in "Anna Christie," which had a deep undercurrent of drama and tragedy, delighted her.

WE were sitting in a corner at one of Sadie Murray's parties one night—Sadie is Beverly Hills' leading hostess and the Alice Roosevelt of Hollywood—when she told me about it.

"It's a marvelous thing to have a dream come true after forty years," she said, giving me that encompassing smile. "I have waited forty years to play a part that had drama as well as comedy. I used to go around New York when I was with Weber and Fields, begging managers to give me a chance in drama. Begging them, my dear. And they'd pat me on the back and tell me how funny I was.

"Charlie Frohman was going to give me a chance. He thought I could do it. We had it all arranged when the Titanic went down and he went down with it. Even the icebergs were against me. So I went into 'Tillie's Nightmare' and played it for so many years it became an institution—and I finally did it in pictures."

Yet deep down, Marie loves comedy, respects it.

I sat next to her at Mabel Normand's funeral. I felt pretty badly myself, because I had loved Mabel Normand like a sister, we had been chums in our youth. I tried to keep a grip on myself, not to break down, and I was doing pretty well as I gazed at the masses of flowers that hid Mabel from us forever, when I looked at Marie's face and that finished me.

"The waste," she whispered, "the waste. The genius. That noble spirit. To go so soon and with so little accomplished of all she might have done." Later, as we all stood outside, she said

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What? Formal evening pajamas! Honest. They appear in Joan Crawford's "Our Blushing Brides" and were designed by Adrian. Will the modern girl adopt them? Who knows? The young woman inside is one of the pretty models in the picture.



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The Thunder Thief

(Continued from page 123)

to Mary Pickford and Marion Davies, "There is the end of genius. None of us could hold a candle to her. We have been here today—you and I and Charlie Chaplin and Harold Lloyd and Ben Turpin and Constance Talmadge and Roscoe Arbuckle and Mack Sennett, all of us who have loved comedy, to pay our last respect to the very spirit of comedy, to the muse of comedy. The joy she could have given the world! Let us not forget that, nor forget always to defend her memory against those who did not know her and could not understand the problems and the circumstances which defeated her. I wish she had been my daughter."

There speaks the real Marie Dressler.

YET there is a ruthless, impatient streak in her, too. An old-time stage star who has a habit of long reminiscences which bore almost to extinction, came up to her on the lot the other day. "Go away," she said, "go right away. I'm too tired. I haven't time. Do go away."

Half an hour later on the set I saw her take little Sally Eilers off behind a bit of scenery and spend two hard hours teaching pretty Sally how to get the most out of her lines.

Marie loves work—her own and everybody else's. If ever a trouper died in her boots, Marie will. Yet she's always crabbing.

When after "The Callahans and the Murphys" she was out for almost a year, she literally had fits all over the place.

"Everything is going to be all right," Frances Marion told her. "Just be patient."

"I can't be patient," said Marie, with that well-known twist of her shoulders. "I'm not a patient woman. I want work. I've worked since I was fifteen. I want a job."

When she began to get one job after another, two pictures at once, she said, "What do they think I am—triplets? I don't do anything but work, work, work. Can't they give a woman a rest. I'm sorry. I'd love to play bridge, but I'm too tired. I'm too tired to do anything but work."

But she always has time to help everybody else, straighten out everything, be on hand when there is trouble. And she said recently, "If I'd keep my nose out of other people's business and my mouth shut, I wouldn't be so tired nights."

But then she wouldn't be Marie Dressler.

Born in Canada, she has a passion for Europe, where she is very popular socially—a distinguished figure among distinguished groups. They understand and value Marie. She is invited to stay in English country houses and French chateaux and Italian villas.

"When I'm through in pictures," she says, "I shall live in Europe."

But I doubt if Marie will ever be through in pictures.

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